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FSQS FACTS

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USDA's
FOOD SAFETY
and QUALITY
SERVICE.

The Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS) is a new agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, established March 14, 1977. But it is heir to a long history of service to consumers, marketers, processors, and producers. Major functions of the agency (1) help to assure that meat, poultry, eggs, and egg products are safe to eat; (2) provide an impartial guide to the quality of many fresh, frozen, canned, and dried foods, and (3) provide a purchasing service for USDA food assistance programs.

Meat and Poultry Inspection

FSQS assures consumers that meat and poultry sold in the United States, or shipped abroad, is safe, wholesome, and truthfully labeled.

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, FSQS inspects for sanitation and wholesomeness all meat and poultry shipped in interstate and foreign commerce for use as human food. Inspection covers processed products such as sausages, frozen dinners, canned meats, and soups made with meat and poultry, as well as raw meat and poultry.

FSQS provides continuous inspection at about 7,100 plants in the United States and monitors inspection in foreign plants that handle meat and poultry for export to the United States.

The inspection program starts with approval of plans for a slaughtering or processing plant to make sure the facilities, equipment, and procedures are adequate to provide for safe and sanitary operations. Actual inspection begins with the live animals and poultry before slaughter and continues throughout the slaughtering process and each of the various steps in processing, handling, packaging, and labeling.

To provide additional safeguards, FSQS samples meat and poultry products for food-poisoning bacteria and harmful residues and monitors food distribution channels for products that may have become spoiled or contaminated in storage or during shipment.

FSQS also establishes standards of identity or content for processed meat and poultry products and requires advance approval of recipes and labels, to help assure that consumers get safe and truthfully labeled products.

FSQS cooperates with the States in developing and maintaining inspection programs for meat and poultry sold in intrastate trade. If States cannot maintain standards equal to Federal inspection requirements, FSQS must assume responsibility for intrastate inspection.

In these efforts to protect consumers, FSQS works with local health agencies, the Food and Drug Administration of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the National Marine Fisheries Service of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Egg Products Inspection

To carry out the Egg Products Inspection Act, FSQS, in cooperation with State departments of agriculture, provides inspection in plants processing liquid, dried, and frozen egg products. The purpose of the Act is to help assure that eggs and egg products which reach the consumer are wholesome. Liquid, dried, and frozen egg products are used by many large manufacturers to make bakery and other prepared products containing eggs.

In addition to performing continuous inspection during processing of egg products, FSQS inspectors make periodic visits to egg handlers and hatcheries to assure that consumer marketing channels are kept free of shell eggs containing bacteria which could cause food illness.

Grade Standards and Grading

For a number of foods, consumers can choose the quality they wish by checking the USDA grade plainly marked on the product or package.

FSQS grading services--based on nationally uniform USDA grade standards--make this possible. And they assure that the grades mean the same thing in any store, in any part of the country, in any season.

Under authority of the Agricultural Marketing Act, FSQS provides voluntary grading services and develops grade standards for meat, poultry, eggs, dairy products, and fresh, canned, frozen, and dried fruits and vegetables.

The grade standards define levels of quality (grades) in a food product. This nationally understood language of quality, together with the grading services which provide an impartial application of the standards, help producers obtain prices commensurate with the quality of the product they have for sale. At the same time they help packers, processors, wholesale buyers, retailers, restaurants, and institutional feeders, as well as consumers, obtain the quality of product they wish.

Grading services are provided, often in cooperation with State departments of agriculture, on request and for a fee. The services are available in all major producing and consuming centers, and provide the basis for a large percentage of all commercial trading in foods in this country.

Food Purchases

Persons receiving food under USDA food assistance programs--school lunch, elderly feeding programs, special aid to mothers and infants--benefit from FSQS' multi-million dollar food purchasing program.

Under authority of Section 32 of Public Law 320 and Section 6 of the National School Lunch Act, FSQS each year buys in large quantities the foods that are needed and wanted in these feeding programs. Because the purchases are made on the basis of the lowest bid, and are made in large quantities to exacting FSQS specifications, the feeding programs get more and better foods than they otherwise could.